DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 121 796 SP 010 067

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TITLE Social, Cultural and Linguistic Factors Affecting the Teaching of Physical Education in the Inner City.
PUB DATE 5 Apr 76
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Curriculum Academy of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April 5, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Problems; *Cultural Differences; Cultural Factors; *Cultural Interrelationships; *Culture Conflict; Inner City; *Physical Education; *Student Teacher Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Multicultural Education

ABSTRACT

The work of the inner city student differs markedly from that of the middle class teacher, resulting in communication problems between teachers and students. The major problem appears to be the clash of cultures that is sustained by the dissimilar value system of the two groups. For instance, the cultural environment of most inner city students is such that their everyday encounters encompass almost every vice known to modern America. The cultural clash has produced a communication crisis which is reinforced by the fact that 80 percent of the black population in the United States speaks "black English" and many members of the Puerto Rican community speak a combination of "black English" and Puerto Rican Spanish. A comparison of two groups of junior high school students indicated that those not exposed to black English were unfamiliar with words and phrases common to the dialect. The implication of this in physical education is that teachers as well as athletes involved in a sport cannot communicate as readily as desirable. To communicate the physical education curriculum effectively, the teacher must learn to appreciate the out-of-school environment of inner city youth. It is imperative that the teachers be honest in their feelings and interactions. The teacher should understand the language structure and vocabulary of the student and strive to establish feelings of rapport. (DMT)

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Social, Cultural and Linguistic Factors Affecting the Teaching of Physical Education in the Inner City

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Milwaukee, Wisconsin

April 5, 1976

SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC FACTORS AFFECTING THE TEACHING OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN THE INNER CITY

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Social, cultural and linguistic differences between inner city students and teachers effect the presentation of school curricula. The purpose of this paper is to describe communications problems between inner city students and teachers and offer implications for the physical education curriculum.

"The inner city is the core and oldest part ..." of today's city.[1] "Various terms are used to describe the inhabitants of the inner city - culturally disadvantaged, underprivileged, socially handicapped, undereducated."[2] The disadvantaged student may differ from other students in language development, self concept, social skills and attitudes toward schooling. The designation, "disadvantaged student" is not necessarilly equated with membership in any ethnic group, but is used to describe individual characteristics and the environment.

The world of the disadvantaged is essentially a different world than that of the teachers of the disadvantaged. Inner city students live in poverty, as contrasted with teachers who very often come from a middle class background, or become middle class because of their salary.

"The great majority of middle class teachers and counselors in public schools, whether they are black or white, simply cannot identify with the cultural environment of the students whose everyday encounters encompass almost every vice and so-called sin known to man in modern America."[3] The major difference would be the clash of cultures that are sustained by dissimilar value systems.

Yet, it is not the diversity in background between student and teacher that is a contributor to problems in physical education curriculum. Fortunately, the field of physical education has recognized the importance of a curriculum that meets the needs and interests of the students. Physical education activities have, for many years, been selected by teachers based on the economic and social realities of the learners served.

These realities translate into the adequacies of school and community physical education and recreational facilities. In addition, a major criterion for the selection of activities is the cost of equipment and supplies. Limitations such as these, account for the omission of "alien" sports such as lacrosse, golf and crew and the popularity of basketball, handball and track.

The clash of cultures has however, produced a communication crisis between inner city students and their teachers. Large groups of students do not speak and understand standard English. "Today, there is a wealth of research available which contains evidence that there is a variety of the English language spoken primarily by Blacks, especially in the large urban centers of our country."[4] "The best evidence we have at the present time ... indicates that approximately eighty percent of the Black population of the United States speaks Black English."[5] "There are others who speak the same dialect; for example, many members of the Puerto Rican community in New York City have learned Black English in addition to Puerto Rican Spanish."[6]

McKeag[7] compared two groups of black and white junior high school students on the basis of their responses to a word association test. He concluded that those not in contact with Black English were unfamiliar with many words and phrases on the test. McTeag also found that "... Black English is very diverse and that even black students may not have the same responses to it."[8]

McKeag's findings have serious implications for physical education and athletics. Specifically, the quality of student

performance of physical education skills may be adversely affected by: the students inability to understand the teacher's explanations and directions; the teacher's inability to understand student questions or comments; and the student's hesitation to ask pertinent questions because of a past history of poor student - teacher communications. McCullough wrote, "The white teacher, with rare exceptions, probably cannot master the subtle nuances of communicating with black children."[9] When teachers and students of different backgrounds fail to understand each other, attempts at communications result in chaos and psychological injury rather than constructive teaching and learning.[10]

The above problem is compounded when urban black students from similar backgrounds and neighborhoods, attending the same school, do not use words in similar ways.[11] Imagine the difficulties encountered by athletes on teams who must communicate and agree upon plans and strategies. The probability exists that high school Blacks, Puerto Ricans and "others" at a team meeting would have great difficulty in arriving at a consensus regarding concerted team efforts.

Writers, experienced teachers and teacher educators have offered recommendations for coping with communications

difficulties. I would like to suggest recommendations that seem to offer practical and workable solutions.

Physical educators must familiarize themselves with the cultural environment of inner city youth. They must understand how the social and economical plight that their students face on a daily level, influences their behavior.

As crises in communications arise, the teacher should avail himself of resources which could help to provide assistance and insight. The teacher should read professional and popular journals in which accounts of problems of inner city neighborhoods and disadvantaged youth are published. Most importantly, the teacher should capitalize on the knowledge of students and their real-life experiences to supplement vacancies in the teacher's background. A solid background will enable teachers to discern fact from fiction.

Physical educators should familiarize themselves with the availability of community resources for athletics in inner city neighborhoods. The kinds of athletic and recreational facilities in the inner city should determine the learning activities of the inner city school physical education curriculum.

Physical educators, in their daily contact with inner city students, must listen to what their students are saying. "Not only with the ears, but also with the heart" suggests one writer.[12] The interest that teachers express should be real and communicate their sincerity. It is important that teachers are honest with themselves and their students. "The inner city students can spot a phony a mile away; conversely, they recognize a "for real" person and respond in kind."[13] John Greene writes that "First, you'll take on credibility; second, students know when you lie and you'll lose all their respect as well as your teaching value."[14]

Physical educators should be open to new perceptions, criticisms and interpretations which may vary from their own. They should be willing to listen and appreciate other points of view.

In recent years, some educators have suggested that a major solution to the communications crisis between inner city youth and their teachers can be solved by teachers conducting their lessons in Black English or Spanglish (a form of English composed of mixed Spanish and English words and phrases). However, this is not the answer. McTeag[15] has reported the lack of universality of Black English.

Physical educators, along with English teachers, speech therapists and other language oriented educators can dedicate themselves to helping disadvantaged students acquire proficiency in standard English. However, to do it effectively, there must be an understanding of the language characteristics prevelant in specific communities.[16]

Louise White[17] has analyzed some of the needs of the inner city minority child. She calls for a new approach to teacher education based on the attributes that a teacher of minority group children should possess. Specific to this discussion are the following attributes.

First, the teacher must understand and respect the intrinsic value of the child's culture. Students learn more from the way teachers behave, the way they talk to students and to each other, the kinds of behavior they approve or reward and the kinds they disapprove or punish then is learned from a host of lessons.

Second, the teacher should be sure that the child has assimilated the symbols used in the classroom and the gymnasium. For example, many inner city physical educators,

teaching large classes, utilize the procedure of having all students assume the position of one knee touching the ground immediately following one long whistle blast. This technique enables the teacher to obtain quiet and the immediate cessation of activity and all body movements.

Third, the teacher should know the language structure and vocabulary of the student and be willing to teach in terms of that vocabulary. When communication difficulties arise during the learning of new skills or following directions, the teacher should not hesitate to utilize the vernacular to clarify his message.

In order to facilitate effective teaching, feelings of rapport between student and teacher should be present. Gottleib and Ramsey[18] wrote that three basic conditions must be met before the needed rapport is achieved. These are:

1. The student must perceive congruence between his goals and the goals of his teacher.

To illustrate, let us assume that the goal of a gymnastics unit is student performance of a parallel bar routine. The student, who has already mastered isolated prallel bar skills, may wish to immediately embark upon performing some spectacular looking moves. On the other hand, the teacher knows

that teaching should proceed from the simple to the complex. Therefore, the teacher must take time to explain the elements of routine composition.

2. The student must perceive that his teacher has the desire to help him attain these goals.

A physical educator who maintains a student performer at his own level of skill development, while others are involved in more advanced skills, must be able to communicate his interest for the student's welfare.

3. The student must perceive that his teacher has the ability to help him achieve his goals.

This concern depends more on the teacher's ability to convey genuine interest and honesty, rather than the teacher's skill proficiency level. These affective qualities may have greater value as an instructional tool than a flawless demonstration.

In summary, it needs to be restated that the world of the inner city student differs markedly from that of the middle class teacher, resulting in communications problems between teacher and student.

To communicate the physical education curriculum effectively, teachers must learn to appreciate the out-of-school

environment of inner city youth. It is imperative that teachers are honest in their feelings and interactions. The teacher should understand the language structure and vocabulary of the student and should strive to establish feelings of rapport.

In conclusion, physical educators should continue to have the curriculum meet the identified and expressed needs of the inner city student. A meaningful physical education curriculum frees the teacher to concentrate on overcoming communication difficulties.

NOTES

1. Leonard Ridini and John E. Madden, Physical Education for Inner City Secondary Schools (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 4.

2. Ibid.

3. William B. Johnson, "Misunderstanding Low Income and Minority Students," The Negro Educational Review 23 (January 1972): 38.

4. Robert A. McKeag, "Black English and Implications for Teachers," Journal of Negro Education 43 (Summer 1974): 326.

5. J.L. Dillard, Black English (New York: Random House, 1972), 229.

6. Ibid.

7. McKeag, op. cit.

8. Ibid., 328.

9. Tom McCullough, "Urban Education: Its No Big Thing," Urban Education 9 (July 1974): 134.

10. John Greene, "On Rapping With the Inner-City School Dude," The Journal of Negro Education 43 (Summer 1974): 310-319.

11. McKeag, op. cit.

12. Greene, op. cit., 316.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. McKeag, op. cit.

16. William A. Stewart, "Continuity and Change in American Negro Dialects," Black-White Speech Relationships, edited by Walt Wolfram and Nona H. Clarke (Washington, D.C.; Center for Applied Linguistics, 1971) 51-73.

17. Louise R. White, "Effective Teachers for Inner-City Schools," The Journal of Negro Education 42 (Summer 1973): 308-314.

18. David Gottleib and Charles Ramsey, Understanding Children of Poverty (Southern Research Associates, 1967) 68.